

MOTION BY SUPERVISORS HILDA L. SOLIS AND
JANICE HAHN

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Opposing Increased Fees for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Since January 2017, the Federal Administration has proposed and implemented dozens of anti-immigrant policies and procedures, doubling its efforts to restrict even legal immigration. In one of its latest attacks, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) published a proposal on November 14, 2019 that would increase application fees for immigrants applying to become U.S. citizens and for individuals following a legal immigration path, such as by seeking asylum in the United States, applying to become a Lawful Permanent Resident (LPR), or renewing their Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status.

The proposed fee increases are unreasonable, outpace inflation, and would place a financial burden on vulnerable and low-income immigrants. The fee for U.S. citizenship applications would increase by 83%, from \$640 to \$1,170, and fees associated with lawful permanent residency would rise by 79%, from \$1,220 to \$2,195. The proposal would also eliminate a program that currently assists low-income applicants with reduced

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SOLIS _____

RIDLEY-THOMAS _____

KUEHL _____

BARGER _____

HAHN _____

application fees. LPRs living in the United States often cite the cost of applications as one of the barriers to seeking U.S. citizenship, and the proposed fee increases would further deter those eligible from naturalizing.

As the U.S. Supreme Court reviews the Administration's decision to terminate the DACA program, DHS's proposal would increase the cost for hundreds of thousands of "Dreamers" to renew their DACA status from \$495 to \$765. In an affront to asylum seekers, the federal government would charge them new fees, \$50 for applications and \$490 for work permits, which would make the United States one of only four countries to charge people who are fleeing persecution.

According to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), the fee increases are necessary to "cover the true cost of [immigrants'] applications" because "current fees do not recover the full costs of providing adjudication and naturalization services." However, DHS intends to set aside 28.5% of the total fee increase to fund a \$207 million annual payment from USCIS to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), a federal entity that investigates, arrests, detains, and deports immigrants. Application fees levied by USCIS, which unlike ICE is not a law enforcement agency, should not be used for federal immigration enforcement activities.

Los Angeles County (County), which is home to 3.5 million immigrants, has taken many actions to support its immigrant population. The County must continue to do its part to break down any barriers immigrants face on their path to U.S. citizenship.

WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Office of Immigrant Affairs, in coordination with County Counsel, to draft a comprehensive County response opposing the proposed rule, "U.S. Citizenship

and Immigration Services Fee Schedule and Changes to Certain Other Immigration Benefit Request Requirements,” to express the significant financial burden that the proposed fees would place on vulnerable and low-income immigrants, to be submitted during the public comment period ending December 16, 2019;

2. Direct the Chief Executive Officer to send a five-signature letter to the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security and the Los Angeles County Congressional Delegation to declare the Board’s opposition to the proposed rule; and
3. Direct the Office of Immigrant Affairs to collaborate with community-based organizations on public education and outreach, utilizing social media as well as other mediums, to inform immigrant communities about the proposed rule and the benefits of naturalization, and to urge eligible individuals to apply for U.S. citizenship or DACA renewal under current rules; and
4. Instruct County Counsel to analyze the proposed rule and to monitor any legal action challenging the proposed rule from taking effect and present recommendations to the Board to file and/or join in as amicus or as plaintiff in litigation, as deemed appropriate by County Counsel.

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